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Kyrgyzstan: Status of the Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (Alga, Kyrgyzstan!) political party; treatment of current or former members and supporters, including regional chairpersons and other executives (2005 - 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Party Background

The Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (also known in Kyrgyz as Alga, Kyrgyzstan!) political party emerged in 2003 upon the grouping of "four small pro-governmental parties": the New Movement (Jany Kyimyl), the New Times (Jany Zaman), the Party of Cooperators and the People of Manas Party of Spiritual Revival (Manas El) (*Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* Dec. 2005, 651; *Europa World Year Book 2005* 2005, 2614; RFE/RL 13 Jan. 2004). In January 2004, a fifth party, the Unity Party of Kyrgyzstan (Birimdik), headed by former Prime Minister Amangeldy Muraliev, also joined Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (*Political Handbook* Dec. 2005, 651; RFE/RL 13 Jan. 2004). Forward, Kyrgyzstan! calls for a more decentralized government (*ibid.* 9 Sept. 2003; *Political Handbook* Dec. 2005, 651) and seeks support from "the intelligentsia and youth of the country" (RFE/RL n.d.b).

On 27 February 2005, Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary elections, which independent observer the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said "fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections in a number of important areas" (OSCE 28 Feb. 2005, 1). Forward, Kyrgyzstan! garnered 10 (*Europa* 2005, 2604; RFE/RL 28 Feb. 2005) to 11 of the 31 seats in the first round (out of a total of 75) (IWPR 3 Mar. 2005) and had more seats than any other party (*Europa* 2005, 2604). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported that in March 2005, Forward, Kyrgyzstan! gained an additional 19 seats in the second round of polls (n.d.a). Some media sources reported that Forward, Kyrgyzstan! won the elections (AKIpress 28 Sept. 2005) and went on to hold a majority in parliament (Interfax 28 Sept. 2005), though this information could not be corroborated by the Research Directorate within time constraints.

Growing voter frustration over the government's controversial extensions of office (AFP 19 June 2005), its handling of the elections, and the low representation of opposition candidates among elected officials prompted large-scale protests that swept the country throughout March 2005 (*Europa* 2005, 2604). On 24 March 2005, a popular coup forced President Askar Akaev to leave the country and resign as Kyrgyzstan's leader two weeks later (*ibid.*).

Current Status of Party

Citing information from Forward, Kyrgyzstan! party member Olga Bezborodova, Kyrgyzstan's Kabar news agency indicated in April 2005 that Forward, Kyrgyzstan! "went underground" following the coup of 24 March 2005 and party members were silent on whether they would cease or continue party activities (5 Apr. 2005). However, a number of media sources have since reported on Forward, Kyrgyzstan! as an active party (24.kg 18 May 2006; KTR 2 May 2006; *Vremya Novostei* 3 May 2006).

On 28 September 2005, news agencies indicated that members of parliament (MPs) voted against the nomination of Roza Otunbayeva as foreign minister (Interfax 28 Sept. 2005; AKIpress 28 Sept. 2005). According to Otunbayeva, who was one of the leaders of the March 2005 coup that forced President Askar Akaev to resign, and who had been acting foreign minister since the coup, her nomination defeat was due to Forward, Kyrgyzstan! party's majority in parliament (ibid.; Interfax 28 Sept. 2005). Otunbayeva apparently called for the crackdown on property that is allegedly illegally owned by the Akaev family and activists of the Akaev regime (Jamestown Foundation Mar. 2006, 26).

Also in September 2005, the Kabar news agency reported that the Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office called for the extradition from Russia of Aydar Akaev, the son of the former president, after Kyrgyz MPs had stripped him of his MP immunity (19 Sept. 2005). Most of the six MPs who voted against Akaev's extradition were members of Forward, Kyrgyzstan!, the Kabar news agency noted (19 Sept. 2005). In April 2006, however, RIA Novosti indicated that despite the fact that he had fled Kyrgyzstan with his parents, Aydar Akaev "is still officially a member of parliament" (25 Apr. 2006).

In May 2006, media sources indicated that according to leading Kyrgyz government ministers, including the prime minister, "there was a tendency of confrontation with the executive and this tendency, as many people think, is generated by certain MP groups, particularly by the faction of the Alga, Kyrgyzstan" (KTR 2 May 2006; see also *Vremya Novostei* 3 May 2006).

Azimbek Beknazarov, the leader of the Kyrgyz Asaba political party, alleged that members of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! "are the backbone of the REBP [the ruling Republican Labour and Unity Party of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev]" (24.kg 18 May 2006; AKIpress 18 May 2006), though this allegation could not be corroborated by the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within time constraints.

Leadership

There was some confusion among the sources consulted as to the identity of the leader of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (24.kg 18 May 2006; Interfax 28 Sept. 2005; *Europa* 2005, 2614; *Political Handbook* Dec. 2005, 651). Although *Europa* and *Political Handbook* listed Bolot Begaliyev as the chairman of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (ibid.; *Europa* 2005, 2614), in its 2005 report on Kyrgyzstan, Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicated that the "pro-government" Forward, Kyrgyzstan! was reported to be run by the daughter of [former] President Akaev (13 Jan. 2005), Bermet Akaeva (HRW 11 Feb. 2005). The information that Bermet Akaeva was the leader of the party was more recently corroborated by 24.kg, a Kyrgyz news agency (18 May 2006). In September 2005, the Russian news agency

Interfax indicated that Akaeva "informally led" Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (28 Sept. 2005). On 25 April 2006, another Russian news agency, RIA Novosti, reported that Akaeva led Forward, Kyrgyzstan! while her father was president. Other sources indicated that Bermet Akaeva is the founder of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (*Vremya Novostei* 3 May 2006; KTR 2 May 2006).

Membership

Estimates of the number of members of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! varied widely: while in 2005, *Europa* indicated that there were some 7,000 members (2005, 2614), the party's former chair Bogot Begaliyev is said to have cited membership figures of 13,000 (RFE/RL n.d.b) and 40,000 (ibid. 9 Sept. 2003).

Human Rights Watch's 2005 report on Kyrgyzstan mentioned that Forward, Kyrgyzstan! "has been accused by numerous and credible sources of forcing people paid from the state budget - teachers, doctors, government officials, students - to become members of the party, under threat of losing their jobs" (HRW 13 Jan. 2005). According to the Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights (KCHR), students at several universities across the country were "being forced to gather signatures in support for Bermet Akaeva's nomination" for the country's parliamentary elections of 27 February 2005 (KCHR 16 Jan. 2005; see also HRW 11 Feb. 2005).

In May 2005, "[d]elegates of the Fourth Extraordinary Congress Alga Kyrgyzstan Party" were quoted by *The Times of Central Asia* (TCA) as stating that their party was "being reborn" and that it had purged the party of members who were "using their membership of the party as a step towards achieving their selfish ends" (TCA 4 May 2005).

Bermet Akaeva

According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Bermet Akaeva ran as an independent candidate, rather than under the banner of her party, Forward, Kyrgyzstan!, during the February 2005 parliamentary elections (n.d.a). Following the 24 March 2005 popular coup, then President Akaev fled with his family to Russia, though sources did not specify whether Bermet Akaeva left with him (Jamestown Mar. 2006).

A report by the Jamestown Foundation, a non-partisan organization aiming to inform United States' policy on matters related to the former Soviet republics (ibid. n.d.), indicated that on 14 April 2005, Bermet Akaeva had "returned to Bishkek to claim the legislative seat she won in the February 27 parliamentary elections" (Mar. 2006, 26). In April 2006, RIA Novosti indicated that Bermet Akaeva was detained shortly after attempting to enter Kyrgyzstan from neighbouring Kazakhstan (25 Apr. 2006). She was quoted by RIA Novostia as stating that she was adamant about pursuing her political career in Kyrgyzstan (25 Apr. 2006). According to the Jamestown Foundation, while members of Akaeva's party were happy with her return, other MPs, as well as the speaker of the parliament, felt that her presence was "destabilizing" (Mar. 2006, 26; see also RFE/RL n.d.a). On 15 April 2005, the day after Akaeva's return, "[s]everal hundred people gathered in front of the Kyrgyz parliament building ... to demand Akayeva's resignation" (Jamestown Mar. 2006, 26; RFE/RL n.d.a). Other riots against Akaeva apparently took place in the western city of Talas (ibid.).

In the wake of the March 2005 coup against President Askar Akaev, the Central Election Commission voted to strip Akaeva of the parliamentary seat she had won (RIA Novosti 25 Apr. 2005; RFE/RL n.d.a; AKIpress 12 Sept. 2005; Kabar 12 Sept. 2005). Akaeva appealed this decision at the Kyrgyz Supreme Court, but lost (ibid.; AKIpress 12 Sept. 2005; RFE/RL n.d.a). The Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office later released the results of an investigation that found that the Forward, Kyrgyzstan! party had "illegally funded" Bermet Akaeva during the February 2005 elections when she ran in the Universitetskiy constituency No. 1 (AKIpress 12 Sept. 2005; Kabar 12 Sept. 2005).

On 25 May 2005, Bermet Akaeva told the Kyrgyz news agency AKIpress that a group of protesters had tried to break through a gate leading to her office and ran after her before they were taken away by law enforcement officers (see also RFE/RL n.d.a). Akaeva said she felt that the event was a planned tactic of "psychological pressure" (AKIpress 25 May 2005). Further or corroborating information on the current situation of Akaeva could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Treatment of Members and Supporters

Information on the status of specific members of Forward, Kyrgyzstan! besides Bermet Akaeva, including regional chairpersons and other executives, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

On 19 June 2005, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that arrest warrants had been issued for allies of the previous Akaev regime, whom President Kurmanbek Bakiyev believed were responsible for widespread rioting in June 2005 that aimed to disrupt the presidential elections of 10 July 2005. Among those who risked arrest was Urmatbek Baryktabasov, who was suspected of involvement with Forward, Kyrgyzstan! (AFP 19 June 2005). According to the TCA, in June 2005, government authorities believed that "counter-revolutionary forces eager to postpone the date of [the] presidential elections" were financing rioters in the capital city of Bishkek (20 June 2005). Information on whether any arrests were eventually made could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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